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INSTRUCTIONS FOR COLLECTING REPRODUCTIVE  
ORGANS OF WILD ANIMALS FOR STUDY

Prepared in the Section of Fur Resources, Division of Wildlife Research

As soon as possible after killing an animal the reproductive organs of which are needed for study, remove the genital tract. Lay the carcass on its back and slit the belly wall in the midline from navel to pelvic bone. With a knife it is possible to cut through the gristle of the symphysis, the joint of the pelvic bone in the midline. This done, the bones can be spread apart, and the bladder and (in females) the vagina will be exposed. Grasp the vagina at its hairy external opening and trim it loose from the rectum, following forward to where the uterus divides into its two horns. It would be well to open the belly wide and push the intestines away. Gently lifting the reproductive organs up as far as they are now trimmed loose, continue to free the horns of the uterus with knife or scissors. At their ends are the ovaries, usually imbedded in fat and hence not always readily found. The uterine horns will serve as a guide to them. If the animal is pregnant and the fetuses are of good size, open the chambers containing them. Preserve the small embryos, but measure or estimate the length of the larger fetuses. These measurements are important for the Bureau records. If the animal is a male, remove and preserve together the bladder and the penis, testicles, and connecting cords.

For preserving the material, formalin is the most practicable. The commercial formalin used should be 40 percent formaldehyde. Use 1 part of this to 9 of water. Use plenty of the mixture, at least 10 times the volume of the organs to be preserved. It is most important that the organs be placed in formalin as soon as possible after the animal is killed. If at all possible, a jar or can of the fluid should be carried along when riding trap lines or whenever there is any likelihood of collecting a specimen.

Specimens shipped to the Bureau may be crowded together if they have been fixed in plenty of formalin for a couple of days previously. Thus, three 1-pint cans may be needed to fix three specimens. But after several days the three specimens could be placed in one container for shipment. Each specimen, however, should be wrapped in cheesecloth and labeled to show the species, name of collector, and date and place taken. Specimens must never be allowed to dry out. If it is not possible to ship them in a jar or can of formalin, they should be wrapped in several layers of rags wet with the fluid and then in oiled paper, and finally packed in an airtight can. Ship immediately.

Since the purpose of collecting the specimens is to learn more concerning the breeding habits of the animals in the wild, and since the organs have to be prepared for microscopic examination, too much care cannot be given to their proper preservation and shipment.

The three things to keep in mind are: (1) Put the organs in formalin as soon as possible; (2) make sure they will not dry out in shipping; and (3) see that each specimen is properly labeled.

